THE NORTHERN ARC:
The Outer Perimeter Reincarnated?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Plans for the proposed Outer Perimeter were scaled back after the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and State Implementation Plan (SIP) lapsed in 1998 due to non-compliance with national clean air standards. In place of the 200-mile circumferential route, a dramatically modified Northern Arc emerged as an alternative in the revised alternative of the Regional Transportation Plan released in the Spring of 1999 by the Atlanta Regional Commission. In the Summer of 1999 the State Department of Transportation held a series of Public Hearings on the proposed 59 mile route extending from I-75 in the Cartersville area eastward to I-85 and GA Route 316 in the Lawrenceville area. Without advocating a position on the project, this paper examines several issues requiring resolution prior to action for or against its ultimate construction.

Research Atlanta released a report in 1993 discussing issues for consideration in the public debate on the highway’s fate. The current report lends some updated perspective on these issues and the text of the original report is contained in an appendix.

A renewed discussion of the Northern Arc should consider the following questions:

1. Alternative Scenarios for I-285, Using Hindsight

   ▼ As promising as new regional planning initiatives sound, who will insure that they are implemented? Will it be GRTA? Will institutionalizing these planning guidelines occur rapidly enough to be of benefit to the Northern Arc corridor or will the pace of land use changes leap ahead of institutional evolution?

   ▼ The questions raised in the original report such as: “How can development be guided?” and “How can existing communities be protected?” are bigger questions/ issues than can be handled individually and separately by the local governments involved. What mechanisms can be integrated into the Northern Arc project to ensure the community addresses subsequent development issues?
2. Physical Constraints on Development and Design Implications

- Will the Northern Arc have a negative impact on the water quality of Lake Allatoona?
- What will be the impact of the Northern Arc on open space in the corridor?
- How would location and interchange design impact nodal development possibilities?

3. Air Quality Issues and their Relationship to the Outer Perimeter

- What type and level of transportation management solutions should be incorporated into future transportation projects in the Northern Arc corridor?
- What will be the consequences of failure to incorporate transportation management strategies?
- What transportation management measures can be built into any new facility at the start that cannot be retroactively added to existing corridors in the vicinity of the Northern Arc?
- What planning and design options should accompany a no-build decision?

4. Effect of Population Growth on the Northern Arc and Vice Versa

- How can population and land use densities be adjusted in the Northern Arc development corridor to make smart growth a reality?
- Can existing residential and commercial areas in the Northern Arc corridor be retrofitted using smart growth principles?
- How many and how large should town center developments become in the corridor?
- Will growth in the Northern Arc deflect future development from the city and/ or inner suburbs?

5. Future Development Patterns in the Region

- How can overall regional form be shifted toward more transportation efficient patterns?
- How can new transportation modes become higher regional priorities?

6. Planning for Nodal Development

- Can the planning process for corridor development in the Northern Arc be effectively coordinated since some of the counties lie outside the ARC planning area?
- What will be the responsibility of the GRTA in assuring that a coordinated land use and transportation investment strategy compatible with Clean Air Standards be followed in the Northern Arc corridor?
- Will plans in place and currently proposed by the Department of Transportation and local planning agencies for the Northern Arc corridor and interchange areas ensure that smart growth/nodal development practices are followed?

7. Purpose of Northern Arc Including Alternatives and Complementary Projects

- What is the purpose of the Northern Arc?
- What is its role in guiding regional growth?
- What are the alternatives?
What user groups will use the highway and in what proportions?

8. Coordination and Financing of Infrastructure Needs

What are the likely infrastructure costs that will be incurred in the project corridor?

What will be the role of public/private partnerships in providing financial support for the program?

What new mechanisms need to be created to assist with the coordinated land use/transportation process?

Will GRTA funding assist in the Northern Arc development process?

With the impending decision on construction of the Northern Arc, the Atlanta region has an opportunity to showcase an innovative land use/transportation development process that could become a model for the region and the nation. Indeed, there is an opportunity before the region to reform the development pattern and not continue with the business as usual growth process. But in order to assure the success of the new approach discussed here, several policy issues, directly and indirectly related to the design and development of the Northern Arc corridor, must be addressed. These policy matters should be openly evaluated and findings disseminated to all interested parties at the local, regional, and state government levels and presented to the public at large before final decisions are made in order to maintain the public trust and sustain and nurture the future quality of life in the region.

Indeed, even if the decision is ultimately made to reject the facility, these fundamental questions of regional transportation and development policy become even more critical. The region’s future depends not on the decision for or against any one particular project, but on the questions we ask ourselves during the decision – and our honesty in answering those questions.
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BACKGROUND

There is an old adage that the more things change, the more they stay the same. This perspective rings truer than ever when considering the policy issues facing the Atlanta region with respect to regional land use and transportation planning matters at the dawn of the new millennium. A decade can bring many changes in a region as dynamic as Metropolitan Atlanta. High rates of population and residential growth in the 1990s propelled and sustained the Atlanta area to the top of national growth charts. At the same time, the number and length of daily automobile trips skyrocketed, sprawl accelerated, and traffic congestion became the number one issue of concern to the public. Even as the region needed more capacity added to its transportation system, federal funding for highway projects lapsed as the region failed to comply with air quality standards, primarily due to excessive ground level ozone levels associated with automobile emissions. And few extensions of transit service have been developed to provide alternative transportation options.

Given this high level of visibility to the mobility needs of the region, it is not surprising, therefore, that the proposed Outer Perimeter became a very high profile, if controversial and unresolved transportation question in the 1990s. Many observers, including environmentalists and citizens residing in its path, characterized the project as a worst-case example of an excessive public sector subsidy to sprawl and pollution. Adding to the unrest, regular media reports continued to keep the issue in the public eye, polarizing opinions further.

In response to negative public pressure, especially pronounced on the southside, and the uncertain status of funding sources, the Georgia Department of Transportation and the Atlanta Regional Commission began scaling back the scope of project at the close of the decade, especially after the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and State Implementation Plan (SIP) lapsed in 1998 due to non-compliance with national clean air standards. In place of the 200-mile circumferential route, a dramatically modified Northern Arc emerged as an alternative in the revised alternative of the Regional Transportation Plan released in the Spring of 1999 by the Atlanta Regional Commission. In the Summer of 1999 the State Department of Transportation held a series of Public Hearings on the proposed 59 mile route extending from I-75 in the Cartersville area eastward to I-85 and GA Route 316 in the Lawrenceville area (Figure 1).

Based on the continued high profile nature of the reconfigured Northern Arc as a potentially important piece of the future transportation network in the Atlanta region it is now appropriate to revisit and redefine the issues raised in Research Atlanta’s original paper on the Outer Perimeter released in 1993. The full text of the original paper is provided in the Appendix. What is striking to the author is that the eight issues spelled out in detail in the original report remain extremely relevant and need to be addressed immediately as a part of the planning...
process before final decisions are made on whether or not to implement the now revised project called the Northern Arc. It must be noted that a new player entered the picture in 1999. The Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA), created by the Governor and State Legislature in 1999, will probably become an important decision maker and have final say as to the character and design of the project, its financing and, indeed, whether or not it is to be built at all. As currently proposed by ARC, it is being considered as a toll road with limited interchanges with existing surface streets. This further implies a nodal development concept at planned interchanges.

As in the earlier report, no position, pro or con, is implied in this document as to whether the Northern Arc should or should not be built. The purpose is simply to raise the level of understanding of the issues involved in making this important decision and to assist a wide-ranging public discussion of the project.

Figure 1
NORTHERN ARC ISSUES

ISSUE I. ALTERNATIVE SCENARIOS FOR I-285, USING HINDSIGHT

The lessons learned from the I-285 experience should now be standard practice in the transportation field and the mistakes made not repeated again. It is now common knowledge, for example, that I-285 became much more than a highway bypass around the city as originally envisioned. Instead, it became an economic development generator for the ever-expanding metropolitan area and, de facto, the region’s Main Street.

The I-285 corridor, in the late 1970s and 1980s, also became the home of two of Atlanta’s three new downtowns (Cumberland/Galleria, and Perimeter Center), both located on the northside. This high capacity 8-lane thoroughfare, following widening and reengineering in the early 1990s, still primarily caters to single occupancy (SOV) automobiles and freight trucks, with no priority provision for carpools, vanpools or buses on high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes. The Perimeter is not used effectively for any level of local bus transit service, nor is it served by a complete network of frontage roads. In short, comprehensive traffic management strategies have not been implemented on the I-285 beltway. As stated in the original report, the mistakes made in the handling of traffic on I-285 should not be transferred to the new route, now referred to as the Northern Arc.

One significant difference exists in the situation occurring today in the path of the proposed Northern Arc not present along the I-285 corridor when it was completed in 1969. Considerable development already exists in the Northern Arc corridor, both residential and commercial, whereas the I-285 corridor was largely developed in a rural greenfield context, especially on the northside.

The framework for at least three future suburban downtowns also exists along the Northern Arc (in the Cartersville, Alpharetta [Northpoint Mall], and Mall of Georgia areas), creating both a need for additional highway capacity and the initial conditions sufficient to justify planning for future bus transit service in the corridor. This situation also raises questions as to how to protect existing residential communities and commercial development as well as the need for sophisticated strategies to guide future development to thwart unneeded sprawl in the multi-county region.

These concerns raise another even more encompassing policy issue that came to the fore in the 1990s - that of the effectiveness of regional planning in the region as a whole and in the Northern Arc corridor in particular. Some observers would say that the regional planning process has been an enigma for the Atlanta region for years. While Atlanta gets credit for having one of the first regional planning agencies in the country, dating back to 1949, its role in shaping regional land use and broad-based transportation management initiatives in recent years has been limited. Part of the problem has been politics, part of it state law prohibitions, but mostly it has been by design. Individual property rights are held dearly in Georgia, and the general idea is that the less government, the better.
The absence of strong regional land use policies linked with transportation investment priorities became a stumbling block to the creation of an effective strategy to develop a plan to meet more stringent clean air standards for the 13-county non-compliance area based on the 1970 Clean Air Act as amended. The limited jurisdiction of the 10-county Atlanta Regional Commission region in the midst of a 20-county Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) added to the dilemma. Land use control decisions are a local issue in Georgia, handled in the Atlanta region primarily at the county level, at least in the suburbs where the most growth has occurred in the past 50 years. Nevertheless, the problem is even more difficult than that created by this fragmented process. In Georgia, the government cannot deny the property owner the highest and best use for a particular parcel of land, the so-called “taking rule.”

On the transportation side, the Georgia Constitution specifically forbids the use of state gasoline tax revenues for anything other than highways and bridges. The state gasoline tax is also one of the lowest in the country, further reducing funding options for non-highway/bridge projects. As a possible counter-balance to this, the GRTA now has the authority to raise funds on its own to finance transportation initiatives and the power to insist that local governments cooperate on regional issues such as land use and transportation matters.

Notwithstanding these systemic problems, planners at the Atlanta Regional Commission forged ahead in the late 1990s to create a comprehensive land use strategy for the region that will assist regional cooperation and more effective comprehensive land use planning in the future. At its May 1999 meeting, the Atlanta Regional Commission adopted three transportation policies related to land use:

1. **Town Center/Activity Center Strategies**
   - Allocate $5 million over the next five years for Town Center/Activity Center Investment Policy Studies...
   - Allocate $350 million over the next 5 years for priority funding of projects resulting from Town Center/Activity Center Investment Policy Studies.

2. **Encourage mixed use development of corridors where public services are currently available.**

3. **Encourage Transit Oriented Development (TOD).**

The Atlanta Regional Commission also adopted fourteen (14) Regional Development Plan Policies (see Table 1) in the summer of 1999 to encourage more clustering of new development, encourage mixed-use development, and support growth management and related “smart growth” strategies. This initiative also proposed the creation of a regional Land Use Coordinating Committee (LUCC) consisting of the planning directors of the 10 counties in the ARC planning area and the City of Atlanta and the Chief of Use and Public Facilities Division of ARC. Representatives of state agencies, homeowners groups, environmental groups, academics, local public school systems and business, real estate, and finance organizations will also sit on the committee. The LUCC had its first organizing meeting on October 1, 1999. The potential of this group remains untested but it promises to add significant new insight to regional development decision-making.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Encourage new development to be more clustered in portions of the region where such opportunities exist.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Strengthen and enhance the residential and mixed-use character of the Central Business District and City and Town Centers.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Strengthen and enhance the residential and mixed-use character of existing and emerging Activity Centers.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Encourage mixed use redevelopment of corridors where public services are currently available.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Encourage Transit Oriented Development.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Support the preservation of stable single family neighborhoods.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Encourage focused infill and redevelopment where acceptable to communities.</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Encourage mixed-use development.</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Encourage Traditional Neighborhood Developments.</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Protect environmentally sensitive areas.</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Align local policy and regulation to support these policies.</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Support growth management through local and state institutional arrangements.</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Encourage the utilization of Best Development Practices.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Create an on-going regional Land Use Coordinating Committee.</td>
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Critical Questions

As promising as these new regional planning initiatives sound, who will insure that they are implemented? Will it be GRTA? Will institutionalizing these planning guidelines occur rapidly enough to be of benefit to the Northern Arc corridor or will the pace of land use changes leap ahead of this institutional evolution?

The questions raised in the original report such as: “How can development be guided?” and “How can existing communities be protected?” are bigger questions than can be handled individually and separately by the local governments involved. What mechanisms can be integrated into the Northern Arc project to ensure the community addresses subsequent development issues?

ISSUE II. PHYSICAL RESTRAINTS
DEVELOPMENT AND DESIGN IMPLICATIONS

While the alignment of the eastern leg of the proposed Northern Arc has been settled (GA 400 to Lawrenceville) and environmental issues largely resolved, there remains alignment maneuvering room on the western segment (Cartersville to GA 400). At the public hearing in Canton on August 17, 1999, for example, Department of Transportation consultants discussed two options for the bypass around Canton. A variable number of interchanges and other options were also presented including the widening of GA 20 to four lanes from I-575 to the Spot Road Connector, as well as a no-build scenario combined with a bus system on GA 20. Environmental issues are also a concern in the vicinity of Lake Allatoona which the Northern Arc will skirt to the north. The recognition of the fragile nature of Lake Allatoona came to public attention following the release of a study conducted by Kennesaw State University in 1998. The report indicated that the lake suffered severe effects from sedimentation, storm water runoff, and pollution from septic systems. An act of the state legislature created a nine-member Lake Allatoona Preservation Authority in 1999 to follow up on the concerns raised. Representatives from Cherokee, Cobb, and Bartow counties sit on the Authority.

Lake Allatoona is managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and is surrounded by 24,000 acres of federally controlled land. The Lake now ranks as the number one recreation area in the nation managed by the Corps and serves as a source of drinking water for about 300,000 people living in a 5-county area. The major threat to its future, however, is not recreation but development. In a national report focusing on “threatened special places” issued in the summer of 1999, the Sierra Club indicated that Lake Allatoona might receive “its final blow if the state pushes ahead with plans to build the northern arc of the Outer Perimeter.” (Lucy Soto, “Study: Northern Arc Would Hurt Allatoona,” AJC, 4-28-99)

It also remains to be seen how open space will be preserved … even if a nodal development strategy is adopted ….

Leading Questions

Will the Northern Arc have a negative impact on the water quality of Lake Allatoona?

What will be the impact on the Northern arc on open space in the corridor?
How would location and interchange design impact nodal development possibilities?

ISSUE III. AIR QUALITY ISSUES AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE OUTER PERIMETER

One of the biggest changes that has occurred in the 1990s in the transportation arena in the Atlanta region has been the rapid increase in the number of miles traveled on streets and highways, now estimated to be 108,000,000 miles annually. Moreover, there are now estimated to be 100 cars for every 116 commuters in the Atlanta area, suggesting that the vast majority of these persons are traveling in a single occupant vehicle (SOV). Encouraging the use of carpools and vanpools in the suburbs which are now the most dependent on single occupant automobile travel is one obvious way to decrease the dependency on SOV travel. It is true that HOV lanes have been added during the decade on the radial freeways leading to and from downtown, but little has been done in the suburbs to facilitate the use of carpools and vanpools. Congestion in fact has increased in the east/west cross-town flow, the one pattern that the Northern Arc would primarily serve.

Most studies have shown that the best time to implement HOV lanes is at the same time that new capacity is added to the street network. This arrangement avoids the need to reduce the lanes available for other traffic. Properly planned, the Northern Arc should provide an opportunity to introduce the HOV traffic management option to the east/west commute pattern in the northern suburbs. In this way vehicle trips could be reduced and create a more competitive environment for bus transit in the future. All of these strategies would work together to improve air quality in the region and reduce sprawl.

It is also useful to ask about other options that would likely be pursued should the Northern Arc not be built. One such alternative might include the widening of another existing east-west corridor such as GA 20, much as what has occurred with the Pleasant Hill/State Bridge/Old Milton Parkway corridor and the Jimmy Carter/Holcomb Bridge/GA 92 corridor. Of course none of these latter routes makes provisions for HOV lanes or offers cross-town transit service. Nor have coordinated land use guidelines been adopted in these corridors.

The big question ... is how to build the Northern Arc ... so as to not encourage more SOV travel ... .

Overcoming the lack of resolve to reform the land planning process in the Atlanta region will take a greater commitment on
the part of politicians than has been demonstrated to date.

In summary, bold transportation management and land use management strategies need to be implemented in the Northern Arc corridor, and become a model for future development in the region. Planning studies conducted by consultants should look beyond the physical placement of the highway itself and the proposed open space in its immediate environs. Planning should consider alternative development and traffic impacts on the corridor and region, recognizing that different combinations of transportation and land use investment and management strategies will make a difference to the future quality of life in the region.

**Leading Questions**

- What type and level of transportation management solutions should be incorporated into future transportation projects in the Northern Arc corridor?
- What will be the consequences of failure to incorporate transportation management strategies?
- What transportation management measures can be built into any new facility at the start that cannot be retroactively added to existing corridors in the vicinity of the Northern Arc?
- What planning and design options should accompany a no-build decision?

**ISSUE IV. EFFECT OF POPULATION GROWTH ON THE NORTHERN ARC AND VICE VERSA**

No longer can the debate or discussion of population growth issues in the Atlanta region involve a rehash of the old chicken and egg refrain as to what causes what - is adding road capacity a cause or an effect of growth? That discussion has not and will not be helpful as it does not address the correct issue nor solve the problem. Growth will continue to occur in Atlanta with or without more roads. The question is how can we accommodate growth and retain and enhance our quality of life?

The Outer Perimeter proposal became a vessel filled with all the negatives associated with growth in the Atlanta region in the early 1990s which hampered informed discussions about planning for the future on the northside of the region. As such, the road project became a rallying ground for the critics who condemned sprawl and characterless suburban landscapes. As was discussed in the preceding section, it may not be the road per se that is the issue but how it will be used and how the land uses in the corridor are managed that will determine the corridor’s success or failure in the long term.

Most appropriately, the debate has now moved to a higher plane and encompasses a more informed discussion of alternative urban design principles, frequently lumped together under the rubric of smart growth guidelines. Other labels such as new urbanism and neotraditional urban planning are associated with this alternative perspective as well. As a group, these...

... sprawl is ... “the failure to recognize that growth and infrastructure must go hand in hand.”
principles suggest a rethinking of urban design by bringing back some ideas from the past, which are sometimes marketed as just emphasizing the basics. Creating a more conducive walking environment with the placement of sidewalks and clustering uses in town centers, adopting narrower streets, replacing the cul de sac subdivision with a grid street pattern, and mixing commercial and residential uses are examples of these principles in action. This approach lessens the dependency on the private automobile and enhances the share of multiple purpose trips, lessening the number of daily trips.

The newly appointed Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA) chair, Joel Cowan, recognized the critical need for incorporating urban design principles with transportation investments as a logical next step in solving Atlanta’s growing traffic congestion problem when he remarked “its land use, stupid” at a GRTA board meeting in the summer of 1999. In short, by combining innovative design principles with new transportation investments the congestion/sprawl/pollution juggernaut now associated with growth in Atlanta can be neutralized. Governor Barnes has also captured the significance of the land use-transportation linkage when he stated that sprawl is not suburban or exurban growth, but “the failure to recognize that growth and infrastructure must go hand in hand.” This connection must be made a reality in future development practices throughout the Atlanta region, something that has not occurred in the past.

**Leading Questions**

- How can population and land use densities be adjusted in the Northern Arc development corridor to make smart growth a reality?
- Can existing residential and commercial areas in the Northern Arc corridor be retrofitted using smart growth principles?
- How many and how large should town center developments become in the corridor?
- Will growth in the Northern Arc deflect future development from the city and/or inner suburbs?

**ISSUE V. FUTURE DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS IN THE REGION**

The multinodal structure of the Atlanta region, particularly the three suburban downtowns (Buckhead/Lenox, Perimeter Center, and the Cumberland/Galleria areas), provides the region with impressive hub locations for massing employment. These areas now offer employment for over 250,000 persons. Another tier of secondary centers, such as the Airport, Midtown, and the Lockheed/Town Center concentration, account for at least another 150,000 jobs. Unfortunately, most of these areas are not uniformly supported with rail and bus transit service or carpool and vanpool programs. Consequently, the potential for them to expand their employment levels is rather limited. The original downtown and Midtown areas are significant exceptions to this generalization, due to their superior transit service levels.

Over one half of the employment in the Atlanta region is not either in suburban downtown settings or in other major nodes but is scattered throughout the five urban
core counties of the region (Fulton, DeKalb, Cobb, Gwinnett, and Clayton). These areas are almost totally dependent on the single occupancy automobile for work access, and most are located in the suburbs, outside the City of Atlanta. These areas are also the growth areas for jobs and the ones least served by the existing transportation network because cross-town (east/west) flows are not well served as has been discussed earlier.

In the future, it can be anticipated that scattered employment locations will continue to be the primary driving force in employment expansion, many of which are now emerging outside the five urban core counties. Encouraging the clustering of this employment around town centers in the Northern Arc could be a high priority so that alternatives to the SOV commute pattern could be nurtured. The failure to nurture employment expansion at key nodal locations and discourage continued scattering of development would undermine other strategies to limit SOV commuting.

Several major public sector infrastructure initiatives proposed in the past for the northern suburbs do not loom as large over the region today as they did a decade ago. One such proposal was for the second airport to be sited in the area. The expansion of Hartsfield Atlanta International Airport and other options such as using Chattanooga as a second airport site now seem to be higher priorities. The potential interstate highway connection with Memphis which might involve the Northern Arc corridor has also diminished as an alternative. Proposals for radial commuter rail service in the region are similarly poorly defined at the moment although support seems to be building for a commuter rail network.

Leading Questions

- How can overall regional form be shifted toward more transportation efficient patterns?
- How can new transportation modes become higher regional priorities?

ISSUE VI. PLANNING FOR NODAL DEVELOPMENT

despite the general recognition that limiting the density of development in an area, except in the immediate vicinity, simply causes more sprawl and shifts the traffic problem elsewhere, the low density development strategy continues to be standard planning practice in Atlanta’s suburbs. In several counties in the Atlanta region prohibitions and quotas limiting the quantity of multifamily housing have been adopted in favor of a higher share of relatively large lot single family homes. When coupled with the traditional cul de sac subdivision design, this design strategy all but ensures the continued dependence on the single occupancy automobile for mobility needs.

The new planning guidelines proposed by the Atlanta Regional Commission include alternative planning and development strategies such as transit oriented development (TOD), and Town Center/ Activity Center Strategies, and there is growing interest in smart growth and related neotraditional urban planning strategies discussed earlier. Only fragmented, piecemeal applications of these approaches in the Atlanta region have unfolded to date. The Northern Arc development corridor would provide an opportunity to initiate a multi-county cooperative program to implement a nodal development strategy for the Atlanta region. Such an initiative would provide an opportunity to demonstrate how
transportation management and smart growth strategies could be harnessed to provide an alternative, less automobile dependent, development scenario across county lines. The major stumbling block to implementing such a strategy is what Governor Barnes has called “the personal will and the political will.” (Smart Growth Conference, Emory University, August 25, 1999).

**Leading Questions**

- Can the planning process for corridor development in the Northern Arc be effectively coordinated since some of the counties lie outside the ARC planning area?
- What will be the responsibility of the GRTA in assuring that a coordinated land use and transportation investment strategy compatible with Clean Air Standards be followed in the Northern Arc corridor?
- Will plans in place and currently proposed by the Department of Transportation and local planning agencies for the Northern Arc corridor and interchange areas ensure that smart growth/ nodal development practices are followed?

**ISSUE VII. PURPOSE OF NORTHERN ARC INCLUDING ALTERNATIVES AND COMPLEMENTARY PROJECTS**

Many constituencies will be served by the proposed Northern Arc, but it is not clear in the planning/ engineering process conducted to date to whom exactly the service will be targeted. Presumably a large segment of users would be motor freight vehicles seeking an alternative cross-regional path to I-285. Local intra-county commuters would be another constituency. A third group of users would be cross-regional commuters seeking a high performance trip across the corridor. A fourth trip type would include locally based non-work trip automobile users. A fifth type of user would be the interstate traveler moving through the region by automobile. The user mix would vary by time of day and over time, but nevertheless it is important to assess the needs of each group for planning purposes.

As mentioned earlier some of the trips on the Northern Arc would be diverted from I-285, but most of the users would likely come from lower performing streets and arterials and from new work and non-work trips resulting from growth in the region. A few of these user groups would be able to take advantage of carpool and vanpool programs and eventually transit alternatives. The needs of each of these groups also differ with respect to the number and spacing of exits. Local trip users (groups 2 and 4) as opposed to through travelers (groups 1, 3, and 5) would benefit from having a greater number of closely spaced exits. More exits would also generate more local traffic and possibly intensify the development pressure at interchanges. In this way it would be more difficult to implement a nodal (town center) development strategy. Allowing only a few exits would enhance the performance of the route and benefit through traffic to the detriment of commuters and possibly weaken vanpool and carpool programs.

Engineers and consultants should be more explicit in the planning process as to whom the roadway is being targeted and not simply report total traffic generation and distribution figures and whether forecasted traffic levels meet Clean Air guidelines. Rates and impacts for several alternative design scenarios and user mixes should be disseminated for public review and discussion.
Leading Questions

- What is the purpose of the Northern Arc?
- What is its role in guiding regional growth?
- What are the alternatives?
- What user groups will use the highway and in what proportions?

ISSUE VIII. COORDINATING AND FINANCING OF INFRASTRUCTURE NEED

The planning/engineering process for the Northern Arc should actively involve local governments who will be making land use decisions in the corridor so that they can plan for infrastructure needs and assist with transportation management initiatives. An active partnering and nurturing role on the part of GRTA in making sure a cooperative and comprehensive approach is undertaken will be critical to the success of this endeavor. It is likely GRTA will be needed as an active financial partner in the planning and development process for the Northern Arc program. This support would be in addition to federal dollars which would become available once a satisfactory Regional Transportation Plan has been approved.

Leading Questions

- What are the likely infrastructure costs that will be incurred in the project corridor?
- What will be the role of public/private partnerships in providing financial support for the program?
- What new mechanisms need to be created to assist with the coordinated land use/transportation process?
- Will GRTA funding assist in the Northern Arc development process?
SUMMARY

With the impending decision on construction of the Northern Arc, the Atlanta region has an opportunity to showcase an innovative land use/transportation development process that could become a model for the region and the nation. Indeed, there is an opportunity before the region to reform the development pattern and not continue with the business as usual growth process. But in order to assure the success of the new approach discussed here, several policy issues, directly and indirectly related to the design and development of the Northern Arc corridor, must be addressed. These policy matters should be openly evaluated and findings disseminated to all interested parties at the local, regional, and state government levels and presented to the public at large before final decisions are made in order to maintain the public trust and sustain and nurture the future quality of life in the region.

Indeed, even if the decision is ultimately made to reject the facility, these fundamental questions of regional transportation and development policy become even more critical. The region’s future depends not on the decision for or against any one particular project, but on the questions we ask ourselves during the decision – and our honesty in answering those questions.
ENDNOTES

1. The modal split refers to the share of vehicular trips by various means such as automobile, transit, walking, and bicycle, etc.
2. The Clean Air Act amendments of 1990 identify “mobile sources” (vehicles) as primary sources of pollution and call for stringent new requirements in metropolitan areas where attainment of National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) is a problem.
3. Jobs/housing balance refers to the ratio of jobs to employed persons. When this ratio approaches 1:1, a balance would exist. Bedroom communities have far more workers than jobs, while more areas usually have a balance of work and workers.
5. Multinodal structure refers to the several downtown areas that have emerged in the region in addition to the central business district including the Perimeter Center/Georgia 400 area, the Cumberland-Galleria, Buckhead-Lenox, and several other business centers such as those emerging around regional malls, the airport, and traditional county seats (Decatur, Marietta, Lawrenceville, etc.). The term multinodal is also referred to as a polycentric form.
6. Power centers are retail shopping centers that emphasize a number of anchor discount stores at the expense of smaller specialty stores typically found in a strip shopping center.